

## Religion and Ecology

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**Institution**—Tufts University (main campus in Medford), private liberal arts college

**Course level and type**—undergraduate/lecture

**Hours of Instruction**—39 hours, 3hrs/week over a 16 week period (with Spring break and other holidays)

**Enrolment and year last taught**—20 students/2003

**Pedagogical Reflections**—students participated vigorously, in part because the course inquired into their own backgrounds, which were diverse (students from both the sciences and arts enrolled). I push the students to address their own notions of religion and of ecology as a tool for engaging others' views of each subject. The Foltz anthology (2002) was well-received. I used PowerPoint in every session, often keyed to students' interest in other university courses and current events. The key element? students having a chance to integrate their own understanding as an element in the discussions and as a vehicle for comprehending why there is so much diversity on this central topic.

## Religion and Ecology

### Course Syllabus

Comparative Religion 10, Tufts University  
Monday and Wednesday, Spring 2003, Dr. Paul Waldau

**Course Description and Goals:** In this course we address specifically the relationship between (1) values one finds commonly asserted in environmental or ecology-based discussions, and (2) values commonly found in religious traditions. We will thus engage subject matter commonly found in courses on ethics, applied ethics, environmental studies and ecology, ethology, animal rights, and comparative religion. Through extensive discussion, the student will ask, "What is the extent of our ethical abilities and what is their relation to religious sensibilities generally?" Many humans have contended that the "community" within the moral circle not only can, but *should*, include much more than just humans. What are those discussions, and what are their principles of inclusion? What do these discussions imply about ethics and the principles that undergird traditional Western ethical discourse? In answering these questions, we will address the great breadth of human moral sensibilities and consider the characteristics of non-Eurocentric traditions.

The most important goal of the course is that, at the completion of this course, the student should be able to articulate his or her own answers to these questions.

**Class Participation and Reading:** Some of the sessions are designated as longer class-wide or smaller group discussions, and each lecture will finish at least 10 minutes before the end of the class session so that questions can be addressed. Pre-assigned questions will be the initial focus of the discussions, but additional questions are welcome and expected. The purpose of this extensive discussion is to encourage each student to articulate her views and thinking on the subjects discussed. Questions possess a power well beyond their answers. Thus, each of us benefits not only from asking our own questions, but also from hearing the questions asked by others. Asking questions and listening carefully are skills which can be acquired and enhanced, especially when this is done widely and in a respectful and sensitive manner.

The texts you will read include both "primary" (that is, original material written by believers) and "secondary" materials (materials about religious belief and practices). These are challenging texts, but since the readings for each section are short, you will be expected to have read them carefully and to be prepared to discuss them. Class participation will count toward the final grade.

Quizzes on the reading are part of the class participation. As we will discuss in the first class session, the quizzes are short and will focus on the readings, asking, for example, what the principal point of an assigned reading was. Examples of such quiz questions will be given in class.

**Meetings with Professor:** Each student will be required to meet at least twice with the professor during designated times. The first meeting will take place within the first two weeks of class, and will last at least 20 minutes. The purpose of such meetings is to encourage as much participation in the class as possible, since by framing specific questions the student will advance her ability to inquire into this complex subject matter.

**Required Reading:** *Worldviews, Religion, and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, by Richard C. Foltz (Editor), Wadsworth, 2002. This book is referred to below as "Foltz."

These readings will be supplemented by additional materials on ecology generally, Islam, the Old and New Testament, early Christian theologians, and various indigenous traditions. In addition, there will be extensive materials listed on a Recommended Reading List.

## Lecture and Discussion Schedule

### Week One—January 15, Wednesday

After introductions, we will discuss how we can work together to clarify the terminology we use when discussing both religion and ecology (the latter term in this class is used in basically the same way we use the term "environmental concerns"). Then we will look at the overlap between (i) ecological or environmental concerns and (ii) traditional religious, philosophical, and ethical concerns. We will finish with group discussions where we focus on how each of us understands and uses the terms "religion," "philosophy," "morality," and "environment/ecology."

Reading for this session: None.

Reading for next session: Foltz xiii–xvii (Preface), 1–7 (Introduction), 9–16 (Editor's comments and Lowdermilk article), 20–30 (Nasr article); 30–37 (White)

## **Part I—The Argument that Religious and Ecological Concerns Overlap**

### **Week Two—January 22, Wednesday only (January 20 is Martin Luther King Day)**

Examples of ecological concerns that are indistinguishable from religious concerns will include an ancient example (Hindu concerns), two examples from indigenous traditions (North American Indians and Australian aborigines), and a contemporary example from modern theology.

We will also mention philosophical concerns which are like ecological concerns—the ancient concern for *beatitudo* and the contemporary example of Peter Singer.

Reading for this session: Foltz xiii–xvii (Preface), 1–7 (Introduction), 9–16 (Editor’s comments and Lowdermilk article), 20–30 (Nasr article); 30–37 (White)

Reading for next session: Foltz 171–181 (Harris); 193–207 (Kaza)

## **Part II—Ecological Themes in Asian Traditions**

### **Week Three**

#### **January 27—Buddhism**

Reading for this session: Foltz 171–181 (Harris); 193–207 (Kaza)

Reading for next session: Foltz 112–119 (Editor’s comments, and Chapple article); 130–143 (Narayanan); 413–420 (Sullivan)

#### **January 29—Hindu traditions**

Reading for this session: Foltz 112–119 (Editor’s comments, and Chapple article); 130–143 (Narayanan); 413–420 (Sullivan)

Recommended: Foltz 119–129 (Dwivedi)

### **Week Four**

#### **February 3—Chinese views**

Reading for this session: Foltz 208 –217 (Editor’s comments, and Tu Weiming article); 217–223 (Tucker article)

Reading for next session: None.

#### **February 5—Overview and class-wide discussion**

Reading for this session: None.

Reading for next session: Foltz 279–280; 280–289 (Hütterman); 290–296 (Frymer-Kensky)

## **Part III—Ecological Themes in the Abrahamic/Semitic Traditions**

### **Week Five**

#### **February 10— The Hebrew Bible**

Reading for this session: Foltz 279–280; 280–289 (Hütterman); 290–296 (Frymer-Kensky)

#### **February 12—The New Testament and Early Christianity**

Reading for this session: Foltz 16–19 (Sittler); 30–37 (White); 318–333 (editor’s comments and Peterson)

## **Week Six**

**February 17**—holiday

**February 19**—Modern Judaism

Reading for this session: Foltz 296-306 (Schwarzschild); 306-317 (Waskow)

## **Week Seven**

**February 24**—Modern Christianity

Reading for this session: Foltz 318-319 (editor's comments); 334-342 (McFague); 342-349 (Chryssavgis); 349-356 (DeWitt)

**February 26**—Islam

Reading for this session: Foltz 357-365 (Foltz); 366-375 (Afrasiabi); 376-385 (Ammar); 385-391 (Khalid)

## **Week Eight—Ecology and Spirituality outside the Sphere of the Major Religious Traditions**

**March 3**—Indigenous peoples' beliefs—more Amerindian views

Reading for this session: Foltz 81-89 (Deloria); 104-111 (Nabhan)

Recommended: Krech, Shepard III 2000. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, New York: W. W. Norton

**March 5**—Other indigenous peoples' beliefs—African and Australian views

Reading for this session: Foltz 89-97 (Graham); 97-103 (Omari); 503-514 (Daneel)

## **Week Nine**

**March 10**—Mid-term exam

### **Part IV—Modern Views of Nature, and the Relation of the Modern Environmental Movement to Religious Worldviews and Values**

## **Week Nine (continued)**

**March 12**—The disenchantment of nature in European and American thought, and reactions to the disenchantment—Romanticism, Thoreau, Muir, Leopold

Reading for this session: Foltz 39-49 (Merchant); 66-75 (Loy); 431-434; handout re early features of environmental thinking in North America

Recommended: Leopold, Aldo, *A Sand County Almanac, with Essays on Conservation*

*from Round River*; Nash, Roderick *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd edn

Reading for next session (March 24): Foltz 456 (editor's comments); 457-464 (King); 464-472 (Ruether)

## **Week Ten**

**Spring Recess (no sessions during Week of March 15)**

## **Week Eleven**

### **March 24**—Ecofeminism

Reading for this session: Foltz 456 (editor's comments); 457-464 (King); 464-472 (Ruether)

### **March 26**—Ecofeminism

Reading for this session: Foltz 472-481 (Riley); 481-492 (Mellor)

## **Week Twelve**

**March 31**—Deep and Social Ecologies—this 25 minute lecture will be followed by small group discussions of this analysis in relation to the disenchantment of nature.

Reading for this session: Foltz 430 (editor's comments); 434-440 (Devall and Sessions)

### **April 2**—Deeper Ecologies

Reading for this session: Foltz 441-446 (Macy); 447-455 (Taylor)

## **Week Thirteen**

**April 7**—Contemporary theology that attempts to take environmentalism as a guideline

Reading for this session: Foltz 525-531 (Thomas Berry); 500-503 (Boff)

**April 9**—Contemporary religious movements that take ecological realities seriously

Reading for this session: Foltz 392-3; 403-413 (Foltz); 420-427 (Harvey)

## **Week Fourteen**

**April 14**—The Place of Non-Human Animals in Ecological and Religious Views

Reading for this session: Foltz 554-560; Handout, Waldau article on religion and animals

**April 16**—The contemporary scene: Animals in the worlds of environmental protection, environmental law, and ecological religion

Reading for this session: Handout, Waldau article "The Animal Invitation"; Handout, Waldau on environmental law, ecological ethics, and nonhuman animals

## **Week Fifteen**

**April 21**—Modern Science, Modern Environmentalism, and Religious Values

Reading for this session: Foltz 531-540 (Lovelock); 540-554 (Eisler)

### **April 23**—New Visions

Reading for this session: Foltz 562-568 (Korten); 568-576 (Norberg-Hodge); 576-582 (Wendell Berry); 582-590 (Rasmussen)

## **Week Sixteen**

**April 28**—Conclusion: Group discussion re the Future of the “Religion and Ecology” movement  
Reading for this session: Foltz 591-596 (The Earth Charter)